

Seniors can get lower prices right now through Internet pharmacies, drugstore.com and costco.com, without signing up for a card and without paying an annual membership fee. Seniors could save 74 to 75 percent more than they will with the drug discount card without Federal Government spending any money at all. We could have legalized the reimportation of drugs from Canada, as a clear majority in this House voted to do. We could have allowed Medicare to negotiate fair prices for its 43 million beneficiaries. But instead, the Republican negotiators specifically put language in the bill that prevented that from happening, making it illegal.

Instead of enacting these fiscally responsible proposals that would be far more effective at reducing seniors' health care costs, the Bush administration and the Republican leadership of this Congress chose instead to protect and grow even larger the already enormous profit margins of the pharmaceutical industry.

While drug companies are required to cover at least one drug to treat most health conditions, they may not cover the drug that a beneficiary's doctor prescribes. It may not be possible to sign up with one plan that offers a discount for all of your prescriptions, but you can only sign up for one Medicare drug card at a time, and that has to last for 12 months. You cannot change for a year. The drug card will only be usable at certain pharmacies so seniors must research whether the card they are considering is accepted at a pharmacy nearby.

Some seniors will not have coverage outside of their home towns. There are a few national drug card plans, but most are regional. For seniors who travel frequently or spend part of the year in a different part of the country, the card they pick may not cover their prescriptions at all. Different drug cards will offer different prices on the same drug. Even with the same drug card plan, prices can vary from one pharmacy to another, and the drug card plans can change the drugs they cover and their prices, and they can do so every 7 days without notifying participants. This makes it nearly impossible for seniors to compare which plan gives them the best deal.

This program is intentionally and unnecessarily complicated in order to confuse seniors and reduce the benefits, even the small benefits that might be entailed in it. So this plan is too complicated, too complex, and far too expensive. There is a much better way of doing it, and we should get at it immediately.

Republicans rigged the system against seniors. The drug card—which should never have been necessary in the first place—leaves seniors with more uncertainty about their ability to afford medications than they have today.

Seniors shouldn't have to suffer through two years of uncertainty and meager benefits, before the real—though still completely inadequate—Medicare benefit begins.

The only reason that seniors are waiting two years is money: the GOP loaded up the bill with so many hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies to the pharmaceutical industry that they did not leave enough money to pay for seniors' benefits.

President Bush and Republican leaders said money was the reason that the drug benefit couldn't start sooner, offer more comprehensive benefits and lower out-of-pocket costs for seniors. They said that we simply couldn't afford a more generous prescription drug bill than the \$400 billion they had set aside—after the Bush tax cuts and huge increases in defense spending—to pay for Medicare reform.

The truth is that we're not spending \$400 billion for drugs for seniors. Republicans gave away 61 percent of that to private corporations.

\$339 billion of the Medicare reform bill goes to the Administration's friends in the pharmaceutical and insurance industries.

\$70 billion goes to private corporations for continuing to provide health care coverage to their retirees. These corporations were already providing retiree health coverage without any government subsidy. Now we'll be paying them to do what they were doing before without government support. And, because the subsidy comes with no strings attached, corporations can still drop retiree coverage entirely without warning.

\$139 billion in overpayments to the pharmaceutical industry. This legislation will increase the drug industry's sales volume and profits dramatically. Because the bill specifically prohibits Medicare from harnessing the buying power of its 43 million beneficiaries to secure lower prices, Medicare dollars—and seniors' own out-of-pocket expenses—are being used to purchase drugs at inflated prices. Seniors who sign up for the drug benefit will be forced to pay higher prices than the VA or HMOs pay for the same drugs. Drug company profits—already the highest of any segment of our economy—are expected to increase 37 percent as a result of this bill.

\$130 billion in overpayments to HMOs. Managed care options were added to Medicare because they were supposed to cost less per patient than traditional Medicare. Under the new law, we'll be paying HMOs as much as 25 percent more than health care costs under traditional Medicare. Even the GAO has confirmed that HMOs are overpaid, but that didn't stop the Republican leadership from increasing their payments again in the bill. Because HMOs tend to attract the healthiest seniors, they ought to be getting paid less, not more. Like the other corporate subsidies, HMO payments come with no strings attached—HMOs can pull in and out of communities, stranding seniors, whenever they please.

Seniors deserve better than this. They deserve a comprehensive and affordable drug benefit, one that they can count on for the length of their retirement. We could afford to give them one, but the Republican majority would rather subsidize private industry than needy seniors.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BLUMENAUER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my Special Order speech at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS)?

There was no objection.

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT STARTS TODAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, here it is June 1, and the Medicare prescription drug benefit starts today. This drug benefit is a long time in coming. In fact, it is the missing link from when Medicare was passed back in 1965. The Medicare prescription drug benefit is going to occur in two phases, and the first phase starts today and that is the Medicare prescription drug discount card which is available to any senior calling 1-800-Medicare or logging on to the Internet, www.medicare.gov.

The formal program is choice based, consumer driven and affordable. In fact, low-income seniors will receive an extra \$600 subsidy this year and next year. When the full Medicare prescription drug benefit kicks in on January 1, 2006, seniors will have the choice whether or not to opt into the program. Taking the prescription drug benefit discount now in no way obligates a senior to a future Medicare prescription drug benefit in the year 2006.

The most important thing about this legislation is that for the first time it actually empowers seniors to make the best choices based on value. For the first time, a senior can call 1-800-Medicare or log onto the Web site medicare.gov, and if they know the name of their prescription drug, their dosage and their ZIP Code, they can find out which Medicare prescription drug card would be best for them, which would cover the medications they are taking, which would provide the best benefits. Whether it be a mail order pharmacy or a neighborhood pharmacy, seniors will have that information at their fingertips.

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Seniors are used to comparison shopping. They shop on line for cruises, they shop on line for clothes at various retail outlets. For the first time, they are going to have the ability to use that same consumer savvy with the purchase of their prescription drugs.

The site is far from perfect, and there will be additional improvements that

occur along the way. I myself envision a day where the site will be very much like perhaps Travelocity, where you just go in and type in the drug that you need and you will come up with several options on where to purchase it for the lowest price. But, for right now, this provides for the first time a database, a consumer-driven database that consumers may access at no cost to them to find out whether or not this program will be beneficial for their particular prescription drug needs and in their particular area.

Rather than a one-size-fits-all program that almost never works, rather than having the government tell you where and when you can buy your medications, this allows seniors to be in the driver's seat.

CELEBRATING THE FORTY-THIRD ANNIVERSARY SERVICE FOR PASTOR AND MRS. JOE CHANEY, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MARIO DIAZ BALART of Florida). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to recognize a great community leader in my district—Reverend Joe Chaney, Jr., the organizer and founder of the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church of Long Beach, California. Last week, I was in attendance as the church celebrated its 43rd anniversary.

Antioch Missionary Baptist Church started with five members in 1961, and today has an active congregational membership of over 1600 parishioners.

Reverend Chaney has long been a tireless advocate for social change, inter-denominational understanding and fellowship in Long Beach. He has served as Director of Missions for the Long Beach Harbor Southern Baptist Association and for five years organized and directed the Long Beach Ministerial Alliance, an interdenominational alliance of local ministers.

He has served as the chaplain at St. Mary's Hospital and the Long Beach Police Department, and is currently the chaplain of the Long Beach Fire Department.

Reverend Chaney is committed to not only serving the church and the surrounding community, but to people all over California. He was selected as the first African-American on the Family Services and Child Care Board of Directors of the California Southern Baptist Convention, and has served as the President of the California Southern Baptist African-American Network.

Mr. Speaker, Rev. Joe Chaney and his wife Mrs. Maxine Moss Chaney have served as mentors to many in Long Beach, and have been widely recognized by their peers for touching the lives of many, and have dedicated their lives to improving the community by serving others.

I congratulate Rev. and Mrs. Chaney on 43 years of dedicated service to Long Beach, our State, and our Nation.

Thank you for 43 great years!

RECOGNIZING ARMED FORCES ON MEMORIAL DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the many men and women who sacrifice their lives every single day in support of our Nation as members of the armed services, both in times of peace and in war.

In the last 2½ years since our Nation was attacked, the service of America's armed services has been on the front pages and news headlines across the country almost every single day. And this past weekend, we celebrated Memorial Day. We dedicated the World War II Memorial, and in towns across the country we had parades and moments of silence in honor of our armed services.

My district was no different. In the City of West Covina and Monterey Park, I had an opportunity to give special recognition to American Legion Posts 790 and 397, who served this Nation with dignity and honor, as well as recognize the living World War II veterans that still live in the district.

In El Monte, I shared Memorial Day with the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10218 and the Patriotic Commission on the Veterans and Homeless Commission.

In Baldwin Park, in the district I represent, my community both celebrated the World War II veterans, those that fought and returned from Iraq, while also mourning the many soldiers that have given their lives over the past several wars.

I was able to speak with Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Veterans from Post 113 during special events in the City of Irwindale and the City of South El Monte.

Each city in my community recognized these men and women who served in many, many wars. With these fine groups, my community recalled with love and gratitude the 16.1 million men and women who served in World War II and remembered the 292,000 service members killed in action. They demonstrate daily why many of them are the Greatest Generation.

Today, 5.7 million World War II veterans live in America. California alone has 475,000 of those World War II veterans that live in our communities.

Just as we celebrate in honor of the greatest generation, we must also remember those fighting today in Iraq and Afghanistan. One hundred and thirty-eight service members were killed during major combat in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and more than 662 since the end of the major combat of May 2003 have been killed.

I am sad to address to mention the names of seven fallen heroes from my own district, two who recently lost their lives just 10 days ago from our area. My heart goes out to the families and friends of Marine Corporal Jorge A. Gonzalez; Army Sergeant Atanasio

Haro Marin; Army Private First Class Jose Casanova; Marine Private First Class Francisco A. Martinez Flores; Army Specialist Leroy Harris-Kelly; Marine Corporal Rudy Salas, who died 10 days ago; and Lance Corporal Benjamin Gonzalez, who died 2 days ago.

Their service to the community I represent and to the Nation will never be forgotten. During both peace and war, the service that these armed service members provide is something that we must all remember.

Just as we send our service members off to battle, we should not forget the many in our communities, families who send their loved ones, who should not be denied any, any, service. We must indeed guarantee them full health care and benefits, adequate burial and bereavement service and support for the military families.

I had several of the family members of the soldiers that I just mentioned who were not able to access services as easily as others of us who would have, because they have language barriers. They did not provide immediate interpretive services to immigrant soldiers and their families. Why is that? Why is there a double standard here? You can send your young ones to be killed to defend our country, and yet you cannot provide them the adequate attention that they so deserve.

In addition, we were lucky this past year that the President signed into law an expedited citizenship process. It now takes 2 years to become a full U.S. citizen. You can put on the uniform, but after that it takes a great deal of time for that process to occur. We still do not have the process set up so that they can go ahead and actively begin to apply. We are talking about 50,000 currently eligible military personnel and reservists who would be eligible for this program. What are we doing to help ramp that program up, as we find every single day soldiers are coming back in coffins, and many with surnames like mine.

I ask us to remember, yes, those that have defended our country, but let us keep intact those many young men and women who are currently serving us right now in our country. May God bless them and their families, and let us bring them home soon.

GROSS AND OFFENSIVE OUTRAGES REGARDING ENERGY CRISIS OF 2000 AND 2001

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FEENEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, there are some outrages that are so gross and offensive that even if it takes years to right them, we should do that, and one of those outrages is the energy crisis of 2000 and 2001 on the West Coast of the United States.

But in fact there are two outrages involving the energy crisis in the Western United States. The first outrage is